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# Principal Support and Academic Optimism in Urban High Schools

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**PRINCIPAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC OPTIMISM**  
**IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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By Todd Edward Perelli

January 2018

**PRINCIPAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC OPTIMISM**  
**IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS**

By

Todd E. Perelli

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Approved January 2018 by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my wife, Whitney, who never gives up on me and helps me and others see the glass as “half full”. I also dedicate this to my parents, Michael Perelli (in memory) and Marybeth Kelley, and my brother, Matt Perelli, for instilling the importance of relationships, humor, and education in life. Harrison, Cora, and Gabe helped me get through this more than they will ever know.

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*“Hey, Todd. Have you ever thought about going into administration?”*

*Dr. Ronald M. Flowe, Principal of West Point Middle and High School, 1998*

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# **PRINCIPAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC OPTIMISM**

## **IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS**

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between principal support and teacher academic optimism. The conceptual framework guiding this study proposed that the existing relationship between the dimensions of teacher academic optimism could be related to principal support. Extant data from high school teachers in urban settings provided quantitative data analysis for the four types of principal support (emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal) and whether they can predict the dimensions of teacher academic optimism (teacher self-efficacy, teacher trust in parents and students, and teacher academic emphasis) or academic optimism itself. This study identified the relationship between different types of principal support and academic optimism in urban high schools that can be applicable to other school settings, and based on past studies, impact student achievement.

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**PRINCIPAL SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC OPTIMISM**  
**IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS**

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (2016), poor housing and health conditions, higher crime, and school dropout rates can be attributed to areas of concentrated poverty. The United States Census Bureau defines an urban area as core census blocks having a density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2016). In 2015, 26.3% of families with 5-17-year olds living in poverty lived in urban or city areas (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016).

The urban public school provides, for many communities, a stable and supportive social network to the families it serves. For the urban school leader, building relationships, maintaining connections, and establishing networks of support is both central to his or her job and the very thing that threatens his or her effectiveness (Gonsalves & Leonard, 2007). Establishing supportive interpersonal relationship and creating a positive organizational culture are some of the primary responsibilities of the principal (Cistone & Stevenson, 2000).

**Support.** Research has demonstrated that principal support is linked to teacher job satisfaction, morale, and attendance (Blase & Blase, 2006; Cross & Billingsley, 1994). Job satisfaction, for example, can have an effect on educators' behavior toward teaching (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Eren (2014) brings attention to teachers' felt responsibility, or the "the degree to which an individual feels personally responsible for

the outcomes of the work” he or she does (p. 74). In addition to the school organization, principal support performs a role interacting with other variables affecting student outcomes. Principal support plays an important function in the professional development and emotional well-being of teachers (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994).

In reference to the well-being of teachers, perception of principal support can stem from elements such as demonstrating appreciation, providing frequent feedback, listening, and providing resources. Principal support can have an impact on stress and burnout, school commitment, job satisfaction, teacher retention, and impact on health.

House (1981) defines social support as “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (p. 15). House, Umberson, and Landis (1988) also connect social support to the emotional and sustaining quality of social relationships. Deelstra and her colleagues (2003) define social support “as actions of others that are either helpful or intended to be helpful” (p. 324). Social support has direct links to the school environment due to the functions that interpersonal relationships serve. House (1981) identified four kinds of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. All are factors that impact teachers during their school experiences.

The amount and kind of support a principal provides a teacher impacts the teacher’s effectiveness and job satisfaction (Littrell et al., 1994). Building supportive relationships between principals and teachers is necessary to create a work environment that assists with reducing frustration (Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989). Blase and Blase (2006) cite some of the negative consequences of a lack of principal support, such as favoritism and its effect on relationships between and among teachers, no voice in the decision-making process, and a lack of resources for classroom instruction.

**Culture of optimism.** Research highlights other variables that strongly influence school effectiveness, academic optimism among them (Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2009). Academic optimism of schools, as stated by Beard et al. (2009), is a “collective construct that includes the cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis” (p. 1136). Academic optimism is cited by Beard et al. (2009) as being rooted in positive psychology. Positive psychology’s relation to academic optimism stems from Bandura’s (1999) social cognitive theory of interaction between cognitive, affective, biological, and behavioral factors.

The triad of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis are the elements that make up the construct of academic optimism of schools. Collective efficacy refers to the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students (Beard et al. 2009). It is a cognitive belief or expectation. Faculty trust in students and parents is an affective aspect based on the feeling that students and their parents are caring, reliable, adept, honest, and open (P. A. Smith & Hoy, 2007). Academic emphasis, the behavioral aspect of academic optimism, is a focus on learning and stresses on particular behaviors in schools. Each of these three elements is dependent on the other and results in academic optimism (Beard et al., 2009).

Beard et al. (2009) state that academic optimism is an organizational characteristic of schools that has an influence on student achievement when socioeconomic status and previous achievement are controlled (p. 2). It is a construct made of the three school attributes of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis. Collective efficacy among teachers is based upon Bandura’s (1999) social cognitive theory and represents the collective belief among an instructional faculty that they can influence student learning. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) support the notion that perceived collective efficacy is a significant factor in the attainment of

organizational goals (p. 10). In reviewing the body of research on variables that have a positive impact on student achievement, Hattie (2015) recently identified collective efficacy as the school-level variable having the highest effect size.

Faculty trust is trust in students and parents. Tschannen-Moran (2004) states that “when teachers believe their students are competent and reliable, they create learning environments that facilitate student academic success” (p. 135). Teachers who trust students and parents are more likely to set high academic expectations for their students (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Schools that set high expectations for student achievement, have orderly learning environments, and have teachers who believe their students will succeed are schools that have teachers who trust both students and their parents (P. A. Smith, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2001).

Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) define academic emphasis, or academic press, as “the extent to which a school is driven by a quest for academic excellence--a press for academic achievement” (p. 427). Schools with high academic emphasis set higher expectations for student achievement and, as a result according to Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000), “will tend to press members to perform when there are high expectations for academic success” (p. 690). Figure 1 displays the conceptual framework for the relationships between principal support and academic optimism.

### **Purpose of the Study**

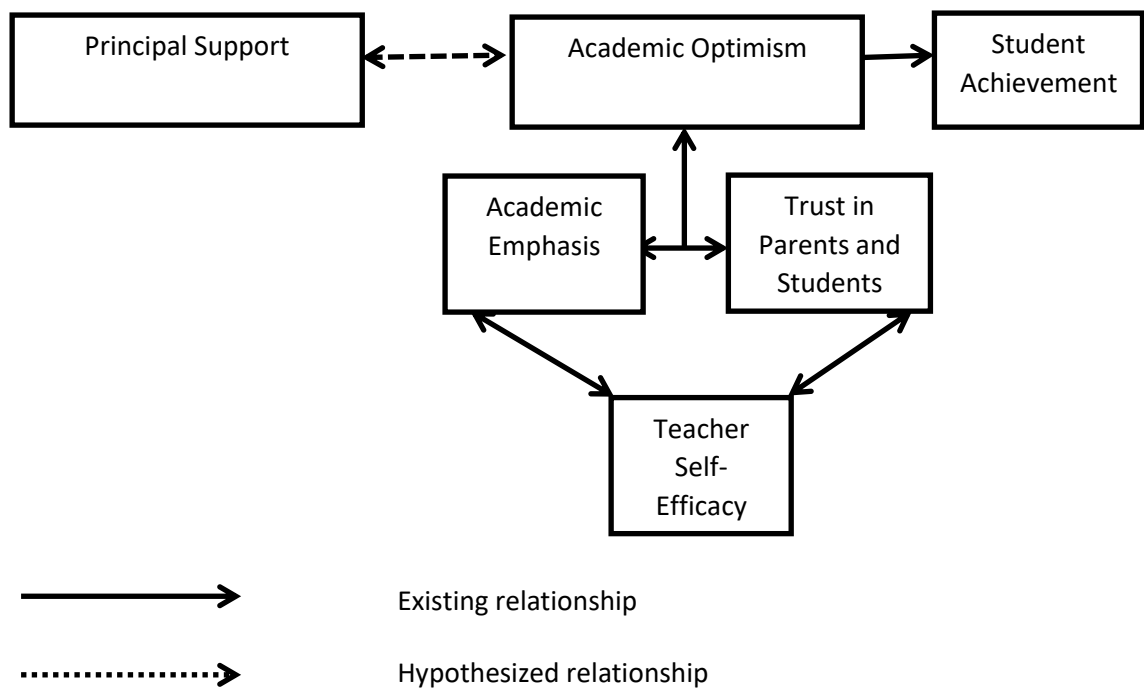
Located in densely populated areas, urban schools serve significantly more students than suburban and rural school districts. High concentrations of poverty, larger populations of language minorities, and transient families are typically the description of urban schools. Many educators would find these types of school setting attributes a barrier to successful student achievement. Studies of principal support and academic optimism focused on urban high schools are scant. This study confirmed that these

variables are significant factors that can contribute to urban school effectiveness and assist principals into reflective practices that result in positive student outcomes in school organizations.

Principal support can have positive or negative consequences depending on the level of support or even how that support is perceived. There may be a relationship between perceptions of principal support, how teachers set expectations for themselves and their students, and how students perform. Principals' supportive behaviors should lead to teacher satisfaction and commitment, which in turn should result in greater academic optimism. Academic optimism is strongly related to higher student achievement.

This study examined the relationship between principal support and academic optimism (see Figure 1).





*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework diagram for the relationship between principal support and academic optimism.

### Research Questions

1. Do academic emphasis, teacher efficacy, and teachers' trust in parents and students in a sample of urban high schools covary to form a single construct of academic optimism?
2. What is the relationship between principal support and academic optimism in a sample of urban high schools?
3. Can principal support predict overall teacher academic optimism and sub dimensions of teacher academic optimism?

### Significance of the Study

United States public education reform has been in near-constant flux for decades. Classroom size, leadership style, revision of state and national standards, teacher

preparation programs, and questioning techniques are a small sample of variables that have been inspected to enhance student achievement. Persistent lack of progress in closing the achievement gap plagues urban schools in particular. There are few studies on predictions about what organizational properties are related to school effectiveness or student achievement, particularly in urban settings. This study provided an opportunity to make connections between the affective states of teachers, their school, teachers' perceptions of principal behaviors, and the effects of principal support.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### *Academic emphasis:*

The degree to which a school is driven for academic excellence (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012).

#### *Academic optimism:*

A construct comprised of collective efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and academic emphasis, the three of which interact among each other to produce a positive learning environment (Fahy, Wu, & Hoy, 2010).

#### *Collective efficacy:*

The perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students (Beard et al., 2009).

#### *Principal Support:*

Teachers' perception of support provided by the principal.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Limitations are the restrictions on a study that are out of the researcher's control. Delimitations are limitations of a study that have been purposely imposed. The size of this sample, 11 urban high schools, can be seen as a limitation. However, all of the urban schools in the sample are taken from the same region with similar attributes in regard to

socioeconomic status (SES) and minority population. Despite the limited number of schools, data were collected from 485 teachers. Since data were collected at the teacher level, it is not possible to explore relationships between achievement and support or academic optimism in this study.

## **Chapter 2. Review of the Literature**

The rise of industrialization led to the transformation of urban areas by the influx of immigrants. With the majority of these immigrants being foreign-born, an atmosphere of cultural dissension and social opposition began to form (McLaughlin, 2014). As immigrants continued to settle within cities, mass schooling became an accepted means of controlling an expanding society that many saw as ignorant and immoral (McLaughlin, 2014). Schools were being operated as a means to reduce crime rather than promote intellectual advancement and social mobility. Kaestle (1973) notes that this type of system sought to produce an immigrant population that was minimally literate, but assimilated in ways to prevent indolence and immorality. Kaestle states, “the schools reflected the attitude of the general native public, who wished to Americanize the habits, not the status, of the immigrant” (p. 142).

### **Urban Development and Reform**

The nineteenth century brought on a common public school system that was established to standardize the education system to meet the perceived needs of the changing demographics of urban areas. Determined to transform the minority culture to that of the mainstream pre-industrial society, educators sought to create and implement what they believed, and Tyack (1974) labeled as the “one best system” of urban education (Tyack, 1974). Industrialization’s factory model influenced this type of system where an established hierarchy ensured greater control of its workers. The urban school system became one in which the decision-making process was centralized to ensure a

uniformed curriculum regardless of a student population's diversity in race, language, class, or culture (McLaughlin, 2014).

In addition to immigrants moving into urban cities, African Americans migrated to urban centers, primarily from economic changes in the south. The changing of the ethnic structure in cities created fear and anxiety in White residents. In response, Whites began to settle in suburban communities. As Whites left, so did their supportive tax base resulting in budget deficits that newcomers were unable to support. As Whites left, the manufacturing sector declined taking away employment opportunities for those in the urban areas. This contributed to an increase in crime, illegal drug trades, and teenage pregnancies (McLaughlin, 2014).

Between 1940 and 1970, four million African American migrants left the South, increasing the Black population share in north and western cities from 4% in 1940 to 16% in 1970 (Boustan, 2010). Many children attending urban schools arrived with emotional and psychological issues stemming from the effects of high rates of poverty, crime, and unemployment that were prevalent in their communities. Tyack's (1974) notion of a "one best system" stayed in place during the twentieth century as schools maintained strict regulations on behavior regardless of the personal issues urban students brought with them to school. By the 1950s, expulsion of students from public school systems was largely precluded by law; therefore, school authorities had to resolve classroom problems within the organization of the school (Tropea, 1987). Tropea (1987) used the term "backstage understandings" to describe the means by which students that were uncontrollable or were labeled as "special" could be removed from the general classroom setting to a special classroom. This became a means for preserving order in the regular classroom in urban school systems where teachers experienced the greatest difficulties (Tropea, 1987). Over time, backstage understandings and actions resulted in a drop in

academic expectations, segregation of “special” students in “special” classes, negative school experiences for students, overall poor achievement, and insufficient preparation for future employment (Deschemes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001).

**Urban schools today.** Urban school systems have an abundance of at-risk students who experience a variety of educational problems. These students display a lack of interest in school and often have poor attendance and low standardized test scores. Additionally, they tend to have a low SES, live in urban environments, be transient, and represent non-native English speakers and minority groups (S. S. Smith, 2011). Low SES students often face significant challenges in their home environments, such as poor health, malnutrition, neighborhood violence, and unstable family situations (Mawdsley, Bipath, & Mawdsley, 2014).

Many urban schools serving high-poverty students have a long history of failure, along with disorder and a lack of discipline, frequent administrative turnover, a prevalence of inexperienced teachers, and piecemeal curriculum with mismatched professional development (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 2). These schools seek ways to ensure instruction is inclusive and sound for all students across all classrooms, how to engage parents, and how to develop and implement order and discipline (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 4).

### **Reform to Accountability**

Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 directed the U.S. Commissioner of Education to conduct a survey dealing with the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin (Viadero, 2006). The United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned The Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS), also known as the "Coleman Report," to do so. James S. Coleman, sociologist from Johns Hopkins University, and

Ernest Q. Campbell, a sociology researcher from Vanderbilt University, led the EEOS to take on an educational study that oversaw survey questionnaires from 4,000 public schools administered to more than 645,000 pupils by 20,000 school teachers (EEOS, 1966). According to Viadero (2006), in addition to its magnitude, the Coleman Report was a groundbreaking study because it used testing data to measure educational disparities. Rather than simply assessing what resources schools had, the Coleman Report sought to find out what students actually learned. Viadero notes that the Coleman Report was significant because “it changed the perspective to concentrating on student performance” (p. 2).

The conclusions from the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) were unexpected in the fact that it stressed how the influence of a student’s family background was the major factor in school success. In other words, the Coleman Report reached the conclusion that public schools did not make a significant difference. The findings of the report suggested that children from poor families and homes without the resources to support education could not learn, regardless of what the school did.

Ronald R. Edmonds, then Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, strongly rejected the Coleman Report finding. Despite acknowledging that family background does indeed make a difference, Edmonds set out to find schools where students from low income families were highly successful to prove that schools can and do make a difference. From these schools, he collected a set of characteristics that correlated with high achievement, and then worked with other schools to build the capacity needed to achieve similar results (O’Brien & Roberson, 2012).

In 1982, Edmonds prepared an article entitled *Programs of School Improvement: An Overview*, in which he cited the five characteristics of an effective school. He listed these as:

- The principal's leadership and attention to the quality of instruction
  - A pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus
  - An orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning
  - Teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery
  - The use of measure of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation
- (p. 4)

Within the article, Edmonds (1982) cites several examples of school improvement projects that were underway at the time. Throughout the descriptions of these projects, Edmonds mentions the “principal” or the “principal’s style of leadership” as a major component during the “needs assessment” stage. He also acknowledges change in the institution and organizational nature of a school as a function of change in administrative and teacher behavior. In addition, Edmonds states that the characteristics of school effectiveness are more well-known than the means by which they become effective (p. 9). He continues by stating “summary observations” that can be applied to school improvement. The first component he mentions is the involvement of both principals and teachers and the behavior of principals and teachers. Edmonds concludes his article with “common characteristics of improvement programs” (p. 10) and cites one of the correlates of effective schools as the principal’s instructional leadership.

High school reform in urban areas has primarily consisted of targeted programs that serve relatively few students. These include small college preparatory or career-focused programs within a school, or entirely separate magnet schools with selective entrance criteria that draw the most academically motivated students. Other forms of urban reform include alternative education programs for students with serious behavior problems or histories of criminal involvement. Some urban districts are also supporting



charter schools consisting of independent programs that represent a wide variety of experimental curricula and teaching techniques (Legters, Balfanz, Jordan, & McPartland, 2002).

Urban high schools face the challenge of economic and demographic changes that bring together an unprecedented amount of poor, minority, and linguistically and ethnically diverse students. These are students, who even outside of urban schools, have had more difficulty succeeding (Legters et al., 2002, p. 4). Other challenges include fewer resources, low prior preparation, troublesome school climates, higher levels of academic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, racial segregation, and constant policy changes caused by frequent leadership changes.

Since the findings of the federal Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), researchers, educators, and scholars have sought to determine not only how low-income school districts have been effective, but also the instructional leadership qualities that drive those effective schools.

The effective schools movement can be seen as a movement that shed light on the struggles and diversity that affect students in their efforts to succeed academically and be contributors to a local and or global society. Levine and Levine (1996) state that in order to build a labor force capable of functioning in the future, opportunities and outcomes in education have to improve significantly.

Reform in urban areas was supported by the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Project in 1998. This federally supported initiative sought to raise student achievement by assisting public schools across the country in implementing effective, comprehensive school reforms that were based upon scientifically based research and effective practices (United States Department of Education, 2016).

In 2001, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) set goals that put pressure on schools to succeed. States were in charge of using their own system of testing, measuring, reporting, and accountability for student progress and success (Baird, 2012, p. 24). NCLB required states to establish grade-level performance expectations and the extent to which the expectations were met. Schools and districts that repeatedly failed to meet these expectations were labeled as failing and faced financial as well as the possibility of replacing staff. However, the National Research Council Committee on Appropriate Test Use (Heubert & Hauser, 1999) stated that:

The lower achievement test scores of racial and ethnic minorities and students from low-income families reflect persistent inequalities in American society and its schools, not inalterable realities about those groups of students.

The improper use of test scores can reinforce these inequalities. (p. 4)

The era of high stakes testing—or as Young (2009) states, exit standards testing--forced schools to increase the amount of instruction and testing devoted to math and reading and took time away from subjects such as art and music.

Initially, reform movements started with a school-by-school approach. As O'Brien and Roberson (2012) state, the initial research was to perform “inspections” of school settings and determine the needs of the students, teachers, and schools themselves. As the reform movement evolved, the “inspections” turned into “audits,” or as is commonly stated today, accountability.

Increased pressure, threats, new tests, or professional development conferences will not affect sizeable change in the most problematic urban high schools. Schools will continue to struggle, and “the potential of too many urban youths will remain unrealized until we take the bold step of crafting, communicating, and implementing new approaches to high schooling that work for urban students” (Legters et al., 2002, p. 3).

**Principal support.** Principals are essential to the management of schools by providing positive educational climates for teachers and students (Bonzonelos, 2008). The principal is responsible for driving the school's vision and guiding the organization, assessing the faculty and instruction, and involving the school community. All of this while being perceived as collegial, meaning supportive and fair. Bonzonelos (2008) defines principal support as: demonstrating appreciation; providing adequate resources and information; maintaining open, two-way communications; supporting collegial climate; offering frequent and constructive feedback; and offering appropriate professional development opportunities (p. 151). Principal support presumably makes the tasks of teaching come easier or become more effective. Supportive principals are seen as considerate, helpful, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014). Support from the principal may also enhance the teacher's sense of efficacy, and even enable the teacher to devote greater attention to parts of the job that are most satisfying (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

**Frameworks for support.** James House's (1981) work in sociology focused on the role that social support had on health in the areas of social networks and social integration. House developed a framework for social support that emphasized four types of support: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Littrell et al. (1994) used House's social support framework and applied the four types of support to principals.

**Emotional support.** Emotional support, which House (1981) considered to be the most important kind of support, demonstrates appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, maintaining open communication, and being open to teachers' ideas (Littrell et al., 1994).

**Instrumental support.** Instrumental support are those behaviors that are intended to directly help a person in need (House, 1981). Principals exhibiting instrumental support provide resources, including materials and space. In addition, instrumental support provides teachers with adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties. Nonteaching duties could entail conferences, time to test students, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Direct assistance with managerial concerns is also an example of instrumental support (Littrell et al., 1994).

**Professional support.** Professional support, also called informational support, provides means of developing a teacher's skill level or assisting in ways to enhance their job performance. Professional support includes providing suggestions to improve instruction or classroom management (Littrell et al., 1994). Opportunities to participate in professional development provides professional support by allowing teachers to enhance their skills set thus increasing their self-efficacy (Rosentholtz & Simpson, 1990).

**Appraisal support.** Appraisal support provides teachers with constructive feedback about their work (Littrell et al., 1994). Communication of expectations and job responsibilities are also parts of providing ongoing personnel appraisal. Providing frequent and constructive feedback about teacher performance is an underlying theme of appraisal support (Bonzonelos, 2008).

The different types of social support refined by House (1981) reflect the varying roles of the principal and the differing needs of teachers. Each type of support can fit into a different niche in which it serves a teacher and the effectiveness of the school organization. What is perceived as supportive to one teacher may not be relevant and deemed a need by another. It is important for principals to be aware of how all four supports serve the collective group. Emphasis by a principal on one type of support strays away from the needs of certain faculty and staff. A principal able to balance the

emotional, instrumental, professional, and appraisal support will better reach the needs of a school organization and thus support productive measures toward student achievement.

### **Positive Psychology: The Root of a Construct**

The positive psychology movement stemmed from shifting research on concepts such as learned helplessness to the study of learned optimism and perseverance (Pajares, 2001). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) launched positive psychology with the aim to “begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with reporting the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (p. 5). The main construct of positive psychology is that of optimism, meaning holding a view of life events and situations characterized by positive thinking and maintaining a positive attitude toward the future. Pajares (2000) states that holding this type of mindset connects to academic benefits such as achievement, goal orientation, and use of learning strategies. At the group level, positive psychology aims at the civic qualities and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship such as “responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

### **Academic Optimism of Schools**

Academic optimism of schools is made up of three properties that are functionally dependent on one another. As stated in chapter 1, the construct of academic optimism is made up of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of collective efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and academic emphasis.

**Collective efficacy.** Bandura (2012) describes social cognitive theory as a means of explaining “one’s functioning and the course of events by one’s actions” (p. 11). Social cognitive theory is a result of three components interacting together: the interaction of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the

environmental forces that impact them (Bandura, 2012). Self-efficacy plays a role in intrapersonal influences; therefore, Bandura (2012) states that individuals themselves can shape events and the direction their lives take. According to Bandura (1993), the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and their commitment to them.

Beard et al. (2010) define collective efficacy as the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students. Hattie (2015) ranks collective teacher efficacy as second for effect sizes ( $r = 1.57$ ) on student achievement in his synthesis of 1200 meta-analyses relating to influences on achievement. Gibson and Dembo (1984) discovered that teacher efficacy could be measured consistently and reliably and was comprised of two factors: the teacher's sense of personal responsibility for student learning; and the teacher's sense of teaching efficacy. Gibson and Dembo summarize teaching efficacy as the belief of the teacher in his or her ability to bring about positive change despite external factors. Bandura (1999) states that "unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (p. 28).

Bandura (1997) put forward the notion that individual human behaviors were purposeful and represented demonstrations between emotional and environmental conditions resulting in specific behavioral outcomes. He noted that these behavioral outcomes were context-specific, meaning one might have high self-efficacy for one endeavor yet lower self-efficacy for another. Bandura (1997) characterized individual self-efficacy as having four sources of cognitive processing: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective state.

Mastery experiences build perceived efficacy and skill (Bandura, 1999). They are experiences in which one's actions result in success and reinforce the abilities to continue

those or similar actions. Vicarious experience relates to people appraising their capabilities in relation to the attainments of others (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), “efficacy beliefs are heightened by alleged performance superiority in relation to group norms but diminished by alleged low normative standing” (p. 87). Social persuasion of collective efficacy exists when verbal encouragement or persuasion, within realistic bounds, supports self-change. This can lead to self-affirming beliefs that promote development of skills and enhance personal efficacy. (Bandura, 1997). The final source of collective efficacy is affective state. Affective states relate to perceived reaction to experiences and can affect people’s judgment of their personal efficacy.

**Faculty trust in students and parents.** Teachers must be able to form trusting relationships with students as well as parents. Beard et al. (2010) state that trust is a necessary component for nurturing and maximizing positive relationships with students. Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy (2001) believe that the degree in which teacher-student and teacher-parent interactions are productive is affected by the trust that holds those relationships together. In addition, Goddard et al. (2001) note the valuable participation of parents in educational decision making necessitate the need for teachers to trust parents.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) study operationalized a multi-faceted definition of trust through five descriptors. They defined trust as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 189). Each of the dimensions is described below:

- *Benevolence* is “confidence in the goodwill of those who are trusted or an attitude of mutual concern” (Goddard et al., p. 7).

- *Reliability* is “the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed. It is an important facet in social relations due to the fact that behavior occurs over time” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187).
- *Competence* ensures that individuals have the skills to perform the task at hand (Goddard et al., 2001).
- *Honesty* refers to the integrity and authenticity of behavior (Goddard et al., 2001).
- *Openness* is “the extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 188).

As stated earlier, Goddard et al. (2001) stated the importance of trust in the school setting. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) examined trust as a collective organizational characteristic and developed Omnibus Trust Survey to measure trust as a school trait that positively relates to collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. The instrument utilized a six-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Some of the survey items include:

- Teachers can count on the parents in this school.
- Teachers in this school show concern for their students
- Students in this school are reliable.
- Teachers in this school believe what students say.
- Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments.

Three factors of trust emerged from the study with “trust in students” and “trust in parents” merging into a single construct of “trust in clients.” The remaining factors were “trust in principal” and “trust in colleagues” (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Their study yielded moderate correlation between the three dimensions which supported their



first hypothesis of “faculty trust in clients, colleagues, and principles are moderately related to each other” (p. 197). Trust in the principal was related to trust in colleagues ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ) and trust in clients ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ). Trust in colleagues was correlated with trust in clients ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s (1999) second hypothesis “that faculty trust was related positively to the degree of parental collaboration in school decision making” was also supported (p. 203). The researchers concluded that faculty trust in students and parents significantly impacted school effectiveness and student achievement in reading and mathematics. In addition, the study yielded indirect connections between faculty trust and student achievement through collective efficacy indicating that higher collective efficacy among a school’s faculty produced greater levels of trust in students and parents even when controlling for SES, ethnicity, and students’ prior achievement (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

**Academic emphasis.** Collective efficacy and faculty trust in student and parents make up two of the three facets of academic optimism. The third is academic emphasis or academic press and refers to the extent to which a school is driven by a quest for academic excellence, a press for academic achievement (Hoy et al., 2006). Schools with a concentration on academic emphasis make student learning and achievement a focal point of the school’s environment.

Lee and Bryk (1989) found positive correlation between a school’s emphasis of academics and its students’ achievement regardless of SES and minority status. In addition, the researchers noted that schools with more orderly and disciplined environments experience less achievement distribution, or achievement gaps, between races. Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) also support academic emphasis as a collective property positively and directly related to student achievement in high schools after controlling for SES.

Goddard et al. (2000) stress the greater the academic emphasis of a school, the more capable it is of enabling student learning. In addition, they note that academic emphasis is a collective activity not something individuals alone can accomplish. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2014) suggest that principals who are approachable and provide equal opportunities may help to create the conditions for a learning environment that is orderly and serious by setting standards for teachers and students and by communicating what is expected of each (p. 83).

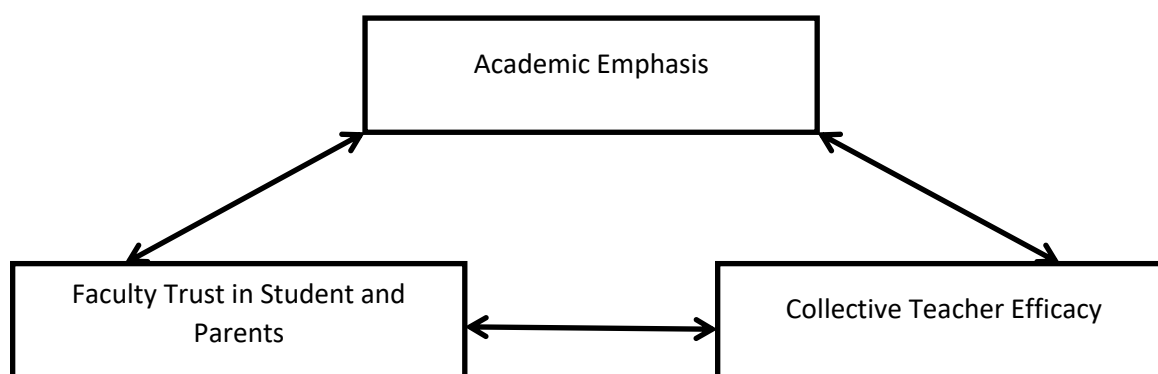
Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) sought to find the relationship between academic press, along with collective efficacy, and on teacher behavior, and in turn, student achievement. The researchers argue that an orderly, serious school environment that is focused on academics should promote a collective belief that teachers have the capability to implement actions steps to make positive academic differences in their students. Using data from the Organizational Health Inventory (Hoy et al., 1991), the researchers predicted a significant relationship between academic press of the school and school achievement in mathematics ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). Even after controlling for SES the correlation was still .44 ( $p < .01$ ). Their findings also noted the stronger the academic press, the higher the degree of school achievement in mathematics (p. 87).

Hoy et al. (1991) also noted that academic press works through collective efficacy. Academic press did not have an independent direct influence on math achievement. The researchers discovered that both SES and academic press contribute to stronger collective efficacy thus promoting greater school achievement. Hoy et al. also summarized that collective efficacy was the most significant variable in their model to influence school achievement. In addition, some of the relationships that were studied resulted in reciprocal effects; for example, “collective efficacy promotes higher school achievement, but higher school achievement also produces greater collective efficacy” (p. 90).

**Academic optimism as a unified construct.** The three school properties of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in students and parents reinforce each other as a single powerful force to explain school performance (Hoy et al., 2006). Each one is an organizational attribute in accumulated perceptions of the group, as opposed to simply just the individual. Hoy et al. (2006) have studied academic optimism as a means to shape school norms and behavior expectations. Further, they note “academic emphasis, efficacy, and trust are similar not only in their nature and function but also in the potent and positive influence on student achievement” (p. 431).

Hoy et al. (2006) state that the three dimensions of academic optimism form a triadic relationship with each element functionally dependent on the others. This rationale supports the notion that faculty trust encourages a sense of collective efficacy, and collective efficacy reinforces and enhances trust. In addition, when a faculty trusts students and parents, they can more easily insist on higher academic standards knowing that they will receive support from those groups (Hoy et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The last interesting note of the facets of academic optimism is recognizing that when the faculty believes it has the ability to perform actions that will positively affect students’ achievement, academic achievement is more heavily emphasized and reciprocally strengthens the sense of collective efficacy (Hoy et al., 2006).

Beard et al. (2010) confirmed academic optimism was a viable construct at the individual level in elementary teachers. Extending on the work of Hoy et al. (2006), Fahy et al. (20010 found that academic optimism was not only a construct at the elementary and school level, but a concept at the individual teacher level in secondary schools.



*Figure 2.* The reciprocal relationship of the three facets of academic optimism

Each dimension of academic optimism represents a cognitive, affective and biological, or behavioral factor. As the cognitive element, collective efficacy represents the aggregated group expectations of teachers. Faculty trust in students and parents ties in the emotional connections and is therefore the affective element. Academic emphasis, the behavioral element, represents the orderly environment and expected academic behaviors (Hoy et al., 2006).

Harris (2012) notes some of the struggles of urban school reform. She highlights urban schoolteachers' low expectations based on racial and class beliefs. Urban schools can be "demoralizing institutions where low expectations dictate what can be done among school personnel and students" (p. 208). Harris underscores the importance of teachers having the necessary beliefs and skills to facilitate significant change. Urban schools that are low performing face organizational barriers including lack of trust, limited resources, low morale among school personnel, and limited hope that change will occur. With these struggles in mind, it is imperative to inspect the relationship that principal support can have on teachers' academic optimism and possibly the future implications they could have on student achievement in urban schools.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principal support and academic optimism in a sample of urban high schools.

#### **Participants**

In large cities across the United States in 2013, 41.4% of students were Hispanic, 26.5% were Black, and 20.7% were White (NCES, 2016). In 2015, 19.5% of 5-7-year olds were living in poverty and 26.3% lived in cities (NCES, 2016). In 2014, 16.6% of students in large cities were English language learners (NCES, 2016). The sample of 8 urban high schools used for this study average a 75% minority population with an average of 70% being economically disadvantaged.

This study investigated the relationships between the principal support and academic optimism constructs of 485 teachers across 11 urban high schools from the northeast United States. Each of the urban high schools were comprised of low socioeconomic status (SES), a high percentage of minority students, and stem from three states in the same region of the United States. All of the urban high schools have over half of their population belonging to minority students except one. In addition, the percentage of students participating in free or reduced-price lunch ranges from 36% of the student population to 89% of the student population. Table 1 provides a description of the participating schools and Table 2 depicts the number of teachers and their percent of survey participation.

Table 1

*Description of Participating Urban High Schools*

School	Total Student Population	% Minority Students	% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	% English Learners
Apple	578	95.8	85	21
Banana	1658	61.9	39	7
Cherry	1353	90.3	75	83
Date	2,887	53.7	41	14
Eggplant	381	90.6	83	14
Huckleberry	783	96.9	89	29
Mango	1235	61.0	56	13
Melon	1887	49.4	46	13
Nectarine	1539	55.1	36	6
Plum	1100	62.5	64	8
Raspberry	1474	53.8	69	12

Table 2

*Number of Teachers Surveyed and Percentage of Survey Totals from Each School*

High School	n	%
Apple	12	2.5
Banana	29	6.0
Cherry	26	5.4
Date	50	10.3
Eggplant	12	2.5
Huckleberry	9	1.9
Mango	70	14.4
Melon	104	21.4
Nectarine	24	4.9
Plum	56	11.5
Raspberry	93	19.2
Total	485	100

## Measures

**Principal support scale.** The instrument used to measure principal support had its origins in the Principal Support Questionnaire established and used by Littrell (1992). The original questionnaire, targeted at special education, consisted of 40 questions measuring the four types of social support based on House's (1981) framework of social support. Field testing of the instrument resulted in the reliability coefficients ranging from .48 to .93 (Littrell, 1992). DiPaola (2012) reworded the original items for a general population of teachers and performed a pilot study of 118 teachers in 24 schools. Data from the pilot study were factor analyzed—four strong factors emerged. The weakest items in each factor were eliminated—the 40 items were reduced to 16, four items measuring each factor. The reliabilities of the measures of each dimension were high. Cronbach's Alphas for each dimension were: .94 emotional support, .93 appraisal support, .88 instrumental support, and .87 for professional support (DiPaola, 2012). The Principal Support Scale consists of 16 items in which respondents are asked to rate statements on a six-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

The original study and the later studies used school-level aggregated data to test the factor structure of the principal support scale and these studies confirmed that a two-factor solution at the school-level was good fit. In this study, however, teacher-level was used as the unit of analysis, therefore, to ensure the constructs of the Principal Support Scale fit at the individual level, factor structure of the Principal Support Scale was tested by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) at the teacher-level. Initially, a single factor structure with 16 items was tested. Based on the results of the single factor structure, a two-factor and then a four-model structure were tested.

In this study, the results from the multiple indicators of model fit indicated that the single-factor model was not a good fit for teacher-level data. Fit indexes showed the following:  $\chi^2 (101, N = 485) = 968.57, p < .001$ , GFI = .80, AGFI = .73, NNFI = .95, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .13 (Figure 3). Secondly, a two-factor model structure was tested for *expressive support* and *instrumental support*. The model fit was slightly improved for two-factor model, but did not adequately fit the data,  $\chi^2 (100, N = 485) = 756.85, p < .001$ , GFI = .84, AGFI = .79, NNFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .11 (Figure 4). In the final model, a four-factor structure was tested for *emotional support*, *professional support*, *instrumental support*, and *appraisal support*. The model fit was substantially improved  $\chi^2 (98, N = 485) = 279.30, p < .001$ , GFI = .92, AGFI = .90, NNFI = .98, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06. Confirmatory factor analysis results clearly indicated that the single-factor model was not a good fit for the data and that the four-factor model had better fit compared with the two-factor models (see Table 3).

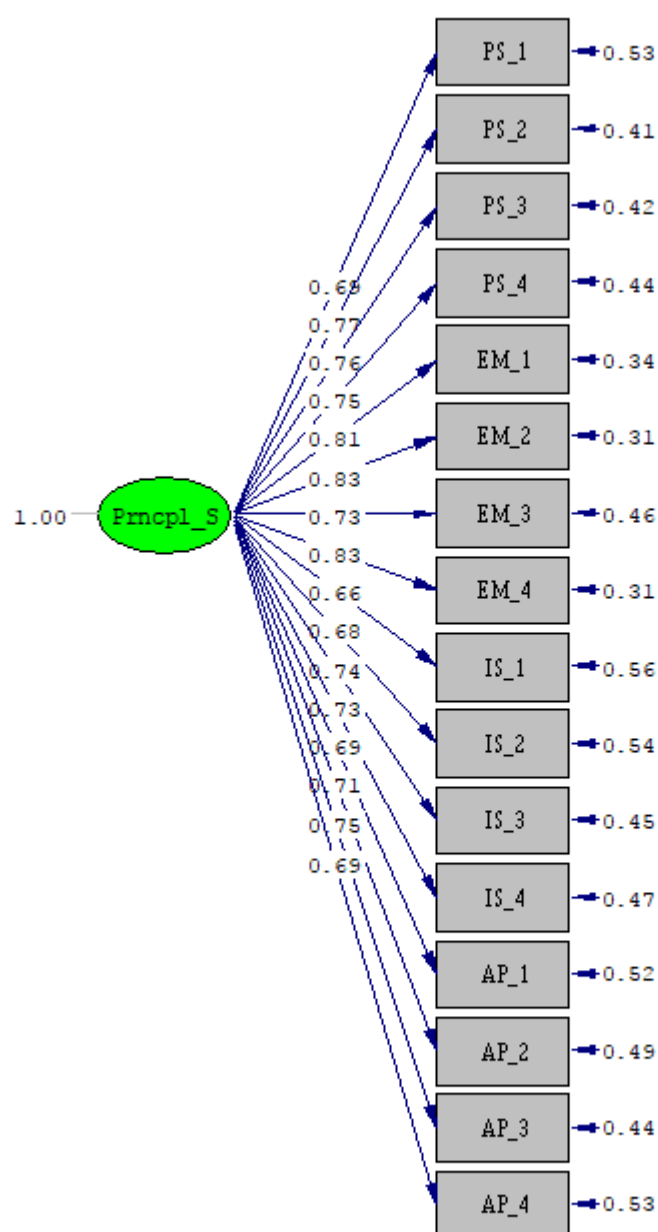


Table 3

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Principal Support Scale*

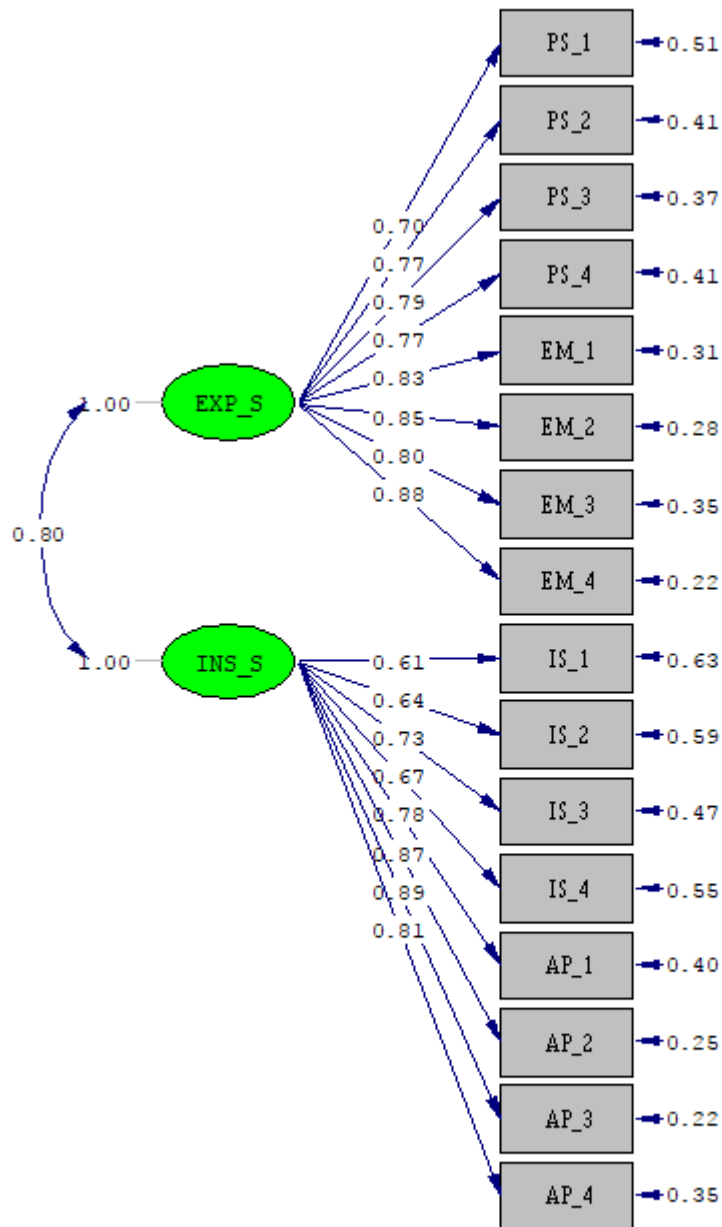
	$\chi^2$	GFI	AGFI	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA
Single Factor	968.57	.80	.73	.95	.95	.13
Two Factor	756.85	.84	.79	.96	.97	.11
Four Factor	279.30	.92	.89	.98	.99	.06

*Note.*  $N = 485$ , degrees of freedom (df) for single factor analysis: 101; df for two factor analysis: 103; df for four factor analysis = 98



Chi-Square=968.57, df=101, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.133

Figure 3. Single-factor model confirmatory analysis of principal support scale



Chi-Square=1001.88, df=103, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.134

Figure 4. Two-factor model confirmatory analysis of principal support scale

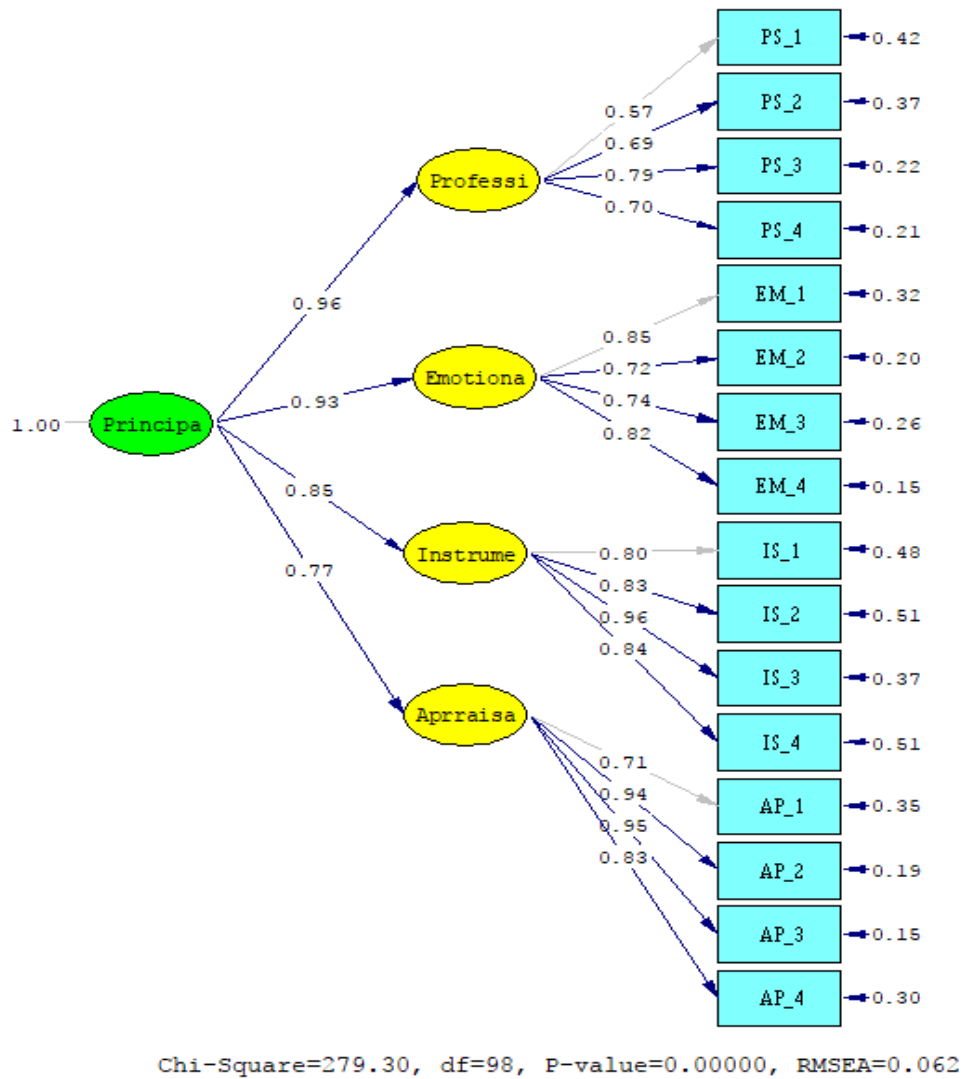


Figure 5. Four factor model confirmatory analysis of principal support scale

Figure 5 depicts the standardized estimates of factor loadings and error variances. All coefficients were statistically significant; standardized factor loadings ranged from .57 to .96 and error variances ranged from .15 to .51 indicating that a high variance of each observed variable was explained by the common factors and that there was low error variance. Items in Figure 5 refer to items in Table 4. For example, PS.1 refers to the survey item “is honest and straight forward with staff.”

Table 4

*Principal Support Scale Statements*

Survey Item	Dimension of Principal Support
1. Gives me undivided attention when I am talking.	Professional Support 1
2. Is honest and straight forward with the staff.	Professional Support 2
3. Provides opportunities for me to grow professionally.	Professional Support 3
4. Encourages professional growth.	Professional Support 4
5. Gives me a sense of importance - that I make a difference.	Emotional Support 1
6. Supports my decisions.	Emotional Support 2
7. Trusts my judgment in making classroom decisions.	Emotional Support 3
8. Shows confidence in my actions.	Emotional Support 4
9. Provides adequate planning time.	Instrumental Support 1
10. Provides time for various non-teaching responsibilities.	Instrumental Support 2
11. Provides extra assistance when I become overloaded	Instrumental Support 3
12. Equally distributes resources and unpopular chores.	Instrumental Support 4
13. Offers constructive feedback after observing my teaching.	Appraisal Support 1
14. Provides frequent feedback about my performance.	Appraisal Support 2
15. Helps me evaluate my needs.	Appraisal Support 3
16. Provides suggestions for me to improve my instruction.	Appraisal Support 4

**Measure of individual academic optimism for secondary teachers: Teacher**

**academic optimism scale.** Academic optimism is a single, unified construct comprised of a triadic relationship between collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents. Collective teacher efficacy represents the collective judgments of teachers regarding the extent to which the group as a whole believes it can be successful (Hoy et al., 2006). Academic emphasis, or academic press, is the collective perspective in which a school is driven by a priority for academic excellence (Hoy et al., 2006). Faculty trust in students and parents relates to the notion that valuable

participation of parents in educational decision-making necessitates the need for teachers to trust parents (Goddard et al., 2001).

The instrument used to measure academic optimism is the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers (TAOS-S). This questionnaire is divided into two parts with a total of nine questions and statements. The first section pertains to the teacher sense of self-efficacy. The self-efficacy section consists of three questions in which respondents are asked to rate statements on a nine-point scale ranging from *nothing* to *a great deal*. The second section includes the remaining six statements in which participants rate a 6-point Likert scale of *never* to *always*. Three of the statements pertain to trust in students and parents, and three relate to academic emphasis. Table 5 displays the questions and statement of the TAOS-S.

Table 5

*Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers*

Questionnaire Item	Measurement of Academic Optimism
1. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	Self-Efficacy 1
2. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	Self-Efficacy 2
3. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	Self-Efficacy 3
4. Most of my students are honest.	Trust in Students and Parents 1
5. My students' parents are reliable.	Trust in Students and Parents 2
6. I trust my students.	Trust in Students and Parents 3
7. I press my students to achieve academically.	Academic Emphasis 1
8. I give my students challenging work.	Academic Emphasis 2
9. I set high, but attainable goals for my students.	Academic Emphasis 3

## **Data Collection**

In order to answer the research questions, extant data were used from data collected in a larger study comparing urban high schools. Data collection utilized Qualtrics to survey the faculty from each school. Incentives were used to increase faculty participation. No demographic information was obtained to guarantee anonymity. Aliases are used to reference each school for anonymity purposes as well. The data were collected with permission and approval under the Human Subjects Committee from the College of William and Mary.

## **Data Analysis**

Individual respondents were the unit of analysis. Hence, the data were not aggregated to school-level, and all analyses were at the teacher-level. After data collection, preliminary survey responses were analyzed using LISREL V8.80 and SPSS V24. Normality assumptions, outliers, and missing values were tested. The data were approximately normally distributed, with skewness ranging from  $-0.8$  to  $-0.1$  and kurtosis values ranging from  $-1.2$  to  $1.9$ . Evaluation of the assumptions of regression analysis yielded no violations of assumptions of linearity, normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals.

Descriptive statistics were examined for the variables under study, then correlations among the variables of the study were analyzed, which led to multiple linear regression analysis to determine combined associations between principal support and teacher academic optimism. Forced entry multiple regression was performed, where all chosen predictors are forced into the model simultaneously. This procedure results in seeing the contribution of each factor of the principal support to predict teacher academic optimism (Field, 2013, p. 322).

Due to the fact that a different unit of analysis was being investigated, a CFA, using the maximum likelihood estimation procedure, was conducted to examine the factor structure of the scales. Model fit was evaluated using multiple fit indices, including, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). GFI assesses the relative amount of the observed variance and covariance explained by the model. AGFI is GFI adjusted by a ratio of the degrees of freedom used in the model to the total degrees of freedom. The model was interpreted as providing a reasonable good fit given a statistically significant chi-square, GFI,  $AGFI > .90$ , CFI and NNFI  $> 0.95$ , RMSEA  $< 0.08$  (Brown, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015; Marsh, Hau, & Wen, 2009).



## Chapter 4. Research Findings

### Findings

**Descriptive statistics and correlations.** The factors of principal support and teacher academic optimism were examined to see the relationship each construct has on the other and which construct of principal support is a better predictor of academic optimism. Academic optimism is comprised of self-efficacy, teacher trust, and academic press. The Principal Support Scale is made up of four factors: emotional support, professional support, instrumental support, and appraisal support. Of the 11 participating schools, 485 teachers' responses were used.

The central tendency was presented by the mean, and variability was presented as standard deviation. In addition, for all variables, the widest gap was demonstrated between the minimum and maximum values of instrumental support (1) and appraisal support (5). They also showed the largest standard deviation, respectively  $SD = .92$  and  $SD = .89$ . All variables had high internal consistency, as demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.95 (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Scores*

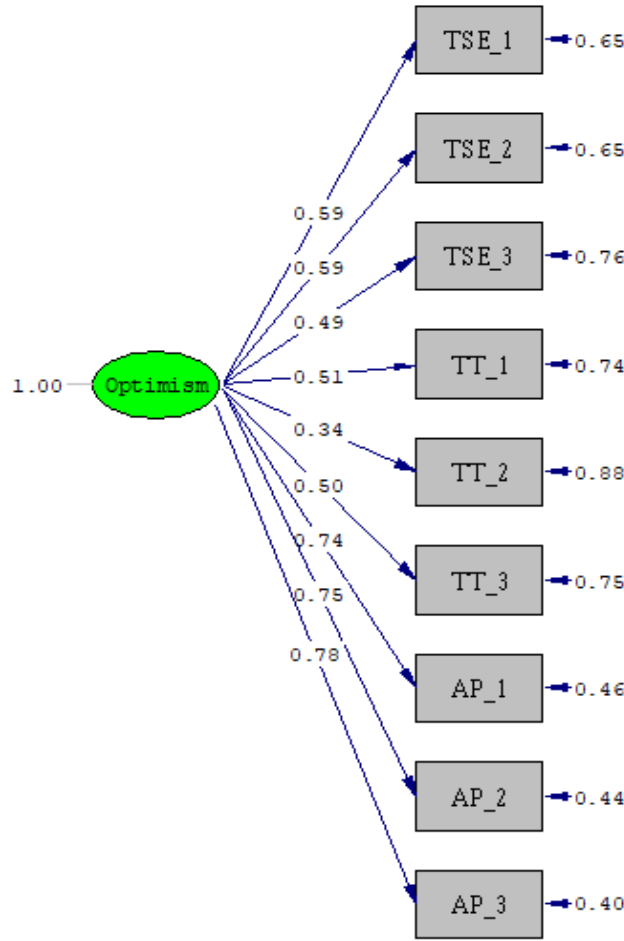
Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Reliability $\alpha$
Self-efficacy	3.97	.58	2.33	5	.84
Teacher Trust	3.76	.49	2.33	5	.82
Academic Press	4.49	.47	3	5	.87
Academic Optimism	4.07	.40	3	5	.85
Emotional Support	4.09	.81	1.25	5	.91
Professional Support	4.13	.73	1.75	5	.86
Instrumental Support	3.56	.92	1	5	.86
Appraisal Support	3.62	.89	1	5	.92
Principal Support	3.85	.74	1.81	5	.95

*Note.*  $N = 485$

**Research Question 1**

*Do academic emphasis, teacher efficacy, and teachers' trust in parents and students in this population sample of urban high schools covary to form a single construct of academic optimism?*

The factor structure of the teacher academic optimism scale (see Table 8) was examined with elementary school teachers (Fahy et al., 2010). In order to determine if the factor structure changed in high schools, the factor structure of the scale was tested by CFA. Firstly, a single-factor model using 9 items was tested. Fit indexes showed the following:  $\chi^2 (27, N = 485) = 616.83, p < .001$ , GFI = .78, AGFI = .63, NNFI = .78, CFI = .79, RMSEA = .21. Figure 6 depicts the single-factor model was not a good fit for teacher-level data.



Chi-Square=616.83, df=27, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.212

Figure 6. First order confirmatory factor analysis of teacher academic optimism scale

Secondly, a second-order factor analysis was tested using three subscales. Fit indexes showed the following:  $\chi^2$  (24,  $N = 485$ ) = 41.70,  $p < .001$ , GFI = .98, AGFI = .96, NNFI = .97, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04. Figure 7 depicts the standardized estimates of factor loadings and error variances. All coefficients were statistically significant; standardized factor loadings ranged from .40 to .89 and error variances ranged from .21 to .84 indicating that a high variance of each observed variable was explained by the common factors and that there was low error variance. Items in Figure 7 refer to items in Table 8. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation indicated second-order with three factor models yielded a good fit for the high

school data as seen in Table 7. As such, construct validity was established. The data used in the study support teacher academic optimism as a single construct in a sample of urban high schools..

Table 7

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Teacher Academic Optimism Scale*

Variables	$\chi^2$	GFI	AGFI	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA
Single Factor	616.83	.78	.63	.78	.79	.21
Three Factor	41.70	.98	.96	.97	.99	.04

*Note.* GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.  $N = 485$ ; degrees of freedom for single factor analysis: 27; degrees of freedom for three factor analysis: 24

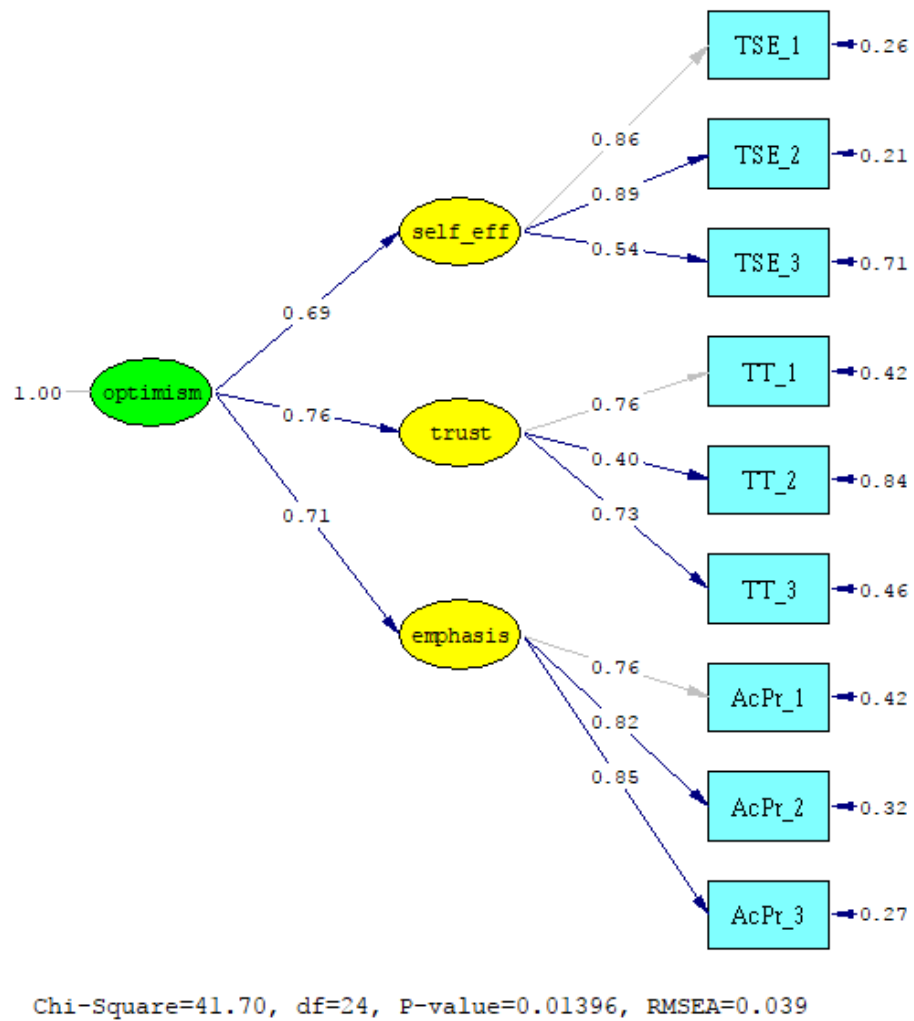


Figure 7. Second order confirmatory factor analysis of teacher academic optimism scale

Table 8

*Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers*

Questionnaire Item	Dimension of Academic Optimism
How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	Self-Efficacy 1
How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	Self-Efficacy 2
How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	Self-Efficacy 3
Most of my students are honest.	Trust in Students and Parents 1
My students' parents are reliable.	Trust in Students and Parents 2
I trust my students.	Trust in Students and Parents 3
I press my students to achieve academically.	Academic Emphasis 1
I give my students challenging work.	Academic Emphasis 2
I set high, but attainable goals for my students.	Academic Emphasis 3

**Research Question 2**

*What is the relationship between principal support and academic optimism in a sample of urban high schools?*

**Correlations.** The bivariate correlations are demonstrated in Table 9. The matrix demonstrates that all of the variables were positively correlated with one another. A key finding is the significant relationship between principal support and teacher academic optimism ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ). Specifically, principal support was significantly and positively correlated with teacher self-efficacy ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ); teacher trust ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ); and academic emphasis ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ). Therefore, principal support is significantly and positively correlated with academic optimism in a sample of urban high schools.

Table 9

*Correlations Between Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-efficacy	-							
2. Trust	.40**	-						
3. Academic Emphasis	.45**	.42**	-					
4. Academic Optimism	.81**	.76**	.78**	-				
5. Emotional Support	.34**	.27**	.31**	.40**	-			
6. Professional Support	.30**	.23**	.30**	.35**	.72**	-		
7. Instrumental Support	.30**	.29**	.25**	.36**	.70**	.70**	-	
8. Appraisal Support	.28**	.19*	.25**	.31**	.63**	.69**	.66**	-
9. Principal Support	.35**	.28**	.31**	.40**	.89**	.90**	.88**	.85**

Note.  $N = 485$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Research Question 3**

*Can principal support predict overall teacher academic optimism and sub dimensions of teacher academic optimism?*

In order to answer this question, four multiple regression analyses were conducted. In the first model, the four factors (professional support, emotional support, instrumental support, and appraisal support) of the Principal Support Scale were identified as the predictor variables for self-efficacy. The results of the first regression model indicated the four factors of principal support explained 13.0% of the variance,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F(4, 480) = 17.98$ ,  $p < .01$ , in teacher self-efficacy. It was found that only emotional support significantly predicted teacher self-efficacy,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ .

In the second model, the four factors of the Principal Support Scale were labelled as the predictor variables for trust. The second regression model indicated the four factors of principal support explained 9.0% of the variance,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(4, 480) = 12.20$ ,  $p < .01$  in

teacher trust. It was found that emotional support,  $\beta = .18, p < .05$ , and Instrumental Support,  $\beta = .22, p < .01$ , significantly predicted teacher trust.

In the third model, the four factors of the Principal Support Scale were named as the predictor variables for academic emphasis. The third regression model indicated the four factors of principal support explained 10.0 % of the variance,  $R^2 = .10, F(4, 480) = 13.95, p < .01$ , in teacher trust. It was found that only emotional support significantly predicted academic emphasis,  $\beta = .20, p < .01$ .

Finally, in the last model, the four factors of the Principal Support Scale were identified as the predictor variables for academic optimism. The last regression model indicated the four factors of principal support explained 17.0% of the variance,  $R^2 = .9, [F(4, 480) = 12.20, p < .01]$ , in teacher academic optimism. It was found that emotional support,  $\beta = .27, p < .01$ , and Instrumental Support,  $\beta = .14, p < .05$ , significantly predicted academic optimism. Table 10 displays the results of a regression analysis in which the four dimensions of principal support were used as predictors of teacher academic optimism and teacher academic optimism's dimensions.



Table 10

*Multiple Regression Analyses of Principal Support and Teacher Academic Optimism (N = 485)*

	Self-Efficacy			Trust			Academic Emphasis			Academic Optimism		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	2.93	.14		3.11	.12		3.67	.12		3.24	.09	
Emotional Support	.18	.05	.25**	.10	.05	.18*	.11	.04	.20*	.13	.04	.27**
Professional Support	-.30	.06	-.03	-.02	.05	-.04	.04	.05	.07	.01	.04	.01
Instrumental Support	.06	.04	.11	.11	.03	.22**	.01	.03	.02	.06	.03	.14*
Appraisal Support	.05	.04	.09	-.02	.03	-.04	.04	.03	.06	.02	.03	.05
$R^2$	.13			.09			.10			.17		
Adjusted $R^2$	.12			.09			.09			.16		
$F$	17.98			12.20			13.95			24.80		

*Note.* B, unstandardized regression coefficient; SE, unstandardized standard error;  $\beta$ , standardized beta; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the results of the study supported teacher academic optimism as a single latent construct in a sample of urban high schools. The results also demonstrated a significant relationship between principal support and academic optimism. Specifically, principal support was significantly and positively correlated with the constructs of teacher self-efficacy, teacher trust, and academic emphasis. Finally, the results of regression analysis indicated the following: (a) emotional support significantly predicted teacher self-efficacy; (b) emotional support and instrumental support significantly predicted teacher trust; (c) emotional support significantly predicted academic emphasis; and (d) emotional support and instrumental support significantly predicted academic optimism. Principal support explained 17% of variance in teacher academic optimism.

## **Chapter 5. Summary and Discussion of Findings**

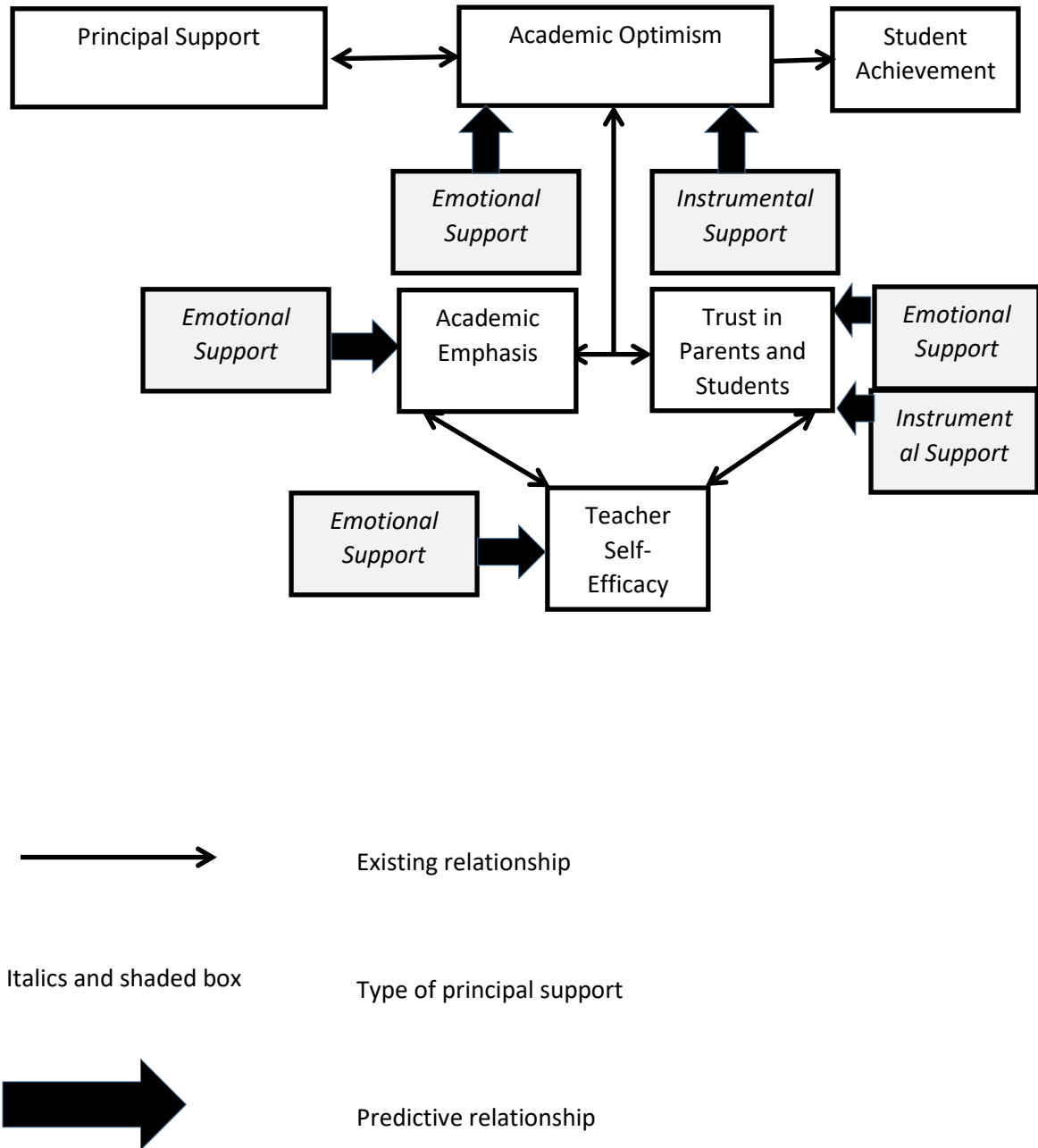
This research study revealed the significant relationship of principal support on teacher academic optimism and its constructs in urban high schools. It provided a rationale for investigating the factors of principal support and their impact on teacher self-efficacy, teacher trust in parents and students, and teacher academic emphasis. This study provides a basis for educational researchers to further examine the impact of principal support on teacher's academic optimism. Implications and recommendations for further research are presented as well.

### **Summary of Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between principal support and teacher academic optimism in urban high schools. The conceptual framework guiding this study proposed that the existing relationship between the constructs of teacher academic optimism could be related to principal support.

A second-order confirmatory factor analysis revealed the construct validity of teacher self-efficacy, teacher trust in parents and students, and teacher academic emphasis to form the single construct of teacher academic optimism in urban secondary educational settings. Correlational analyses and multiple regressions were performed between the examined constructs of teacher academic optimism and the factors of principal support. Correlations between all variables of and including principal support and teacher academic optimism, demonstrated positive correlations with one another.

Significant findings include the positive impact emotional support has on predicting teacher self-efficacy. Figure 8 displays the updated conceptual foundation of findings.



*Figure 8.* The relationship between principal support, types of principal support, academic optimism, and the constructs of academic optimism in urban high schools.

## **Discussion**

Teacher efficacy represents the judgments of teachers regarding the extent to which he or she believes they can be successful (Hoy et al., 2006). Academic emphasis, or academic press, is the collective perspective in which a school is driven by a priority for academic excellence (Hoy et al., 2006). Faculty trust in students and parents relates to the notion that valuable participation of parents in educational decision-making necessitates the need for teachers to trust parents (Goddard et al., 2001). Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, and Kurz (2008) and Beard et al. (2010) confirmed academic optimism was a viable construct at the individual level in elementary teachers. Extending on the work of Hoy et al. (2006), Fahy et al. (2010) found that academic optimism was not only a construct at the elementary and school level, but also a concept at the individual teacher level in secondary schools. The results of a second-order CFA in this study were consistent with Hoy and his colleagues' work on academic optimism (Hoy et al., 2006; P. A. Smith & Hoy, 2007) and Fahy et al. (2010) at the individual teacher level in secondary schools.

Correlations between the variables of principal support and teacher academic optimism were positively correlated with one another. There was a significant relationship between principal support and teacher academic optimism. When investigating the correlations between principal support and the variables of teacher academic optimism, it was revealed that the strongest relationship was between principal support and teacher self-efficacy. Correlations between teacher academic optimism and the factors of principal support uncovered a strong correlation with the factor of emotional support.

Regression analysis provided a closer examination of the relationship between principal support and teacher academic optimism. Four regression models were run with emotional support, professional support, instrumental support, and appraisal support as the predictor variables for teacher academic optimism and each of its constructs. In the regression analysis for predicting self-efficacy, only emotional support significantly predicted teacher self-efficacy. In fact, this finding showed the strongest relationship between the constructs of teacher academic optimism in all of the regression models. This finding emphasizes the importance for principals to understand the relationship between what they do and the possible influence on teachers' work.

**Teacher turnover in urban schools.** Principals in many urban schools face what some call barriers to student achievement including, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, low student achievement levels, high dropout rates, poor student attendance, and difficulty in recruiting or keeping qualified teachers. Wayne and Youngs (2003) site teacher turnover, teacher experience, and teacher qualifications as having an impact on student achievement. Ingersoll (2003) links teacher turnover with teacher shortage. He sites that turnover has heavy consequences for organizations with work conditions that require extensive interaction among participants. Organizations, such as schools, depend on commitment, continuity, and cohesion among employees and turnover is disruptive to such requirements (p. 148). Ingersoll (2003) also notes that high-poverty public schools have significantly higher turnover rates than schools that are more affluent. In addition, urban schools have more turnover than suburban and rural public schools. Almost half of all teacher departures are a result of either job dissatisfaction or a desire to pursue an improved career opportunity either in or out of education (Ingersoll, 2003). Teachers

leaving because of job dissatisfaction do so due to low salary, lack of administrative support, discipline problems, or a lack of influence over decision-making (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 150). The lack of administrative support reinforces the findings of this study and the impact principals can have on increasing teachers' self-efficacy.

**Principals increasing teachers' self-efficacy.** An advantage that principals have in their role is the capability to stimulate the professional work circumstances that nurture, support, inspire and reassure teachers about the quality of their practice (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995). Hipp and Bredeson (1995) point out that the principal is the key to facilitating decisions that affect not only the working conditions of the school, which favor classroom achievement, but also the teachers who work in it.

Research supports the relationship of teacher self-efficacy on organizational outcomes and student achievement (Beard et al., 2009; Goddard et al., 2004; Ross, 1995). This study finds that emotional support of principals can predict teacher self-efficacy. Enhancing teacher self-efficacy strategies need to be investigated by principals and can be done so by providing traits of emotional support. For example, Ross (1995) cites leadership actions positively correlated with teacher self-efficacy including: "emphasizing accomplishment, increasing teachers' certainty about the worth of their practice, being responsive to teacher concerns, promoting an academic emphasis in the school, and providing supervision perceived to be useful by teachers" (p. 241). In addition, emotional support can be demonstrated through giving teachers a greater role in decision making as it can affirm their competence. Ingersoll (2007) found that schools in which teachers have more control over key schoolwide and classroom decisions have fewer problems with student discipline, demonstrate more teacher and administration

collegiality and cooperation, have more committed and engaged teaching staff, and retain more teachers (p. 23). This is one action that a principal can influence that has nothing to do with the social, familial, financial, and other challenging attributes teachers face in urban school settings.

Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi's (2010) study on how school leadership influences student learning cite transformational leadership practices that demonstrate significant positive effects on teacher-efficacy. For example, offering individualized support by showing respect for individual staff members, demonstrating concern about their personal feelings, maintaining an open door policy, valuing staff opinions, and modeling desired practices and values.

**Emotional intelligence.** Principal preparation courses may consider more emphasis and study on the concept of emotional intelligence (EI). EI comprises a variety of skills including emotional perception and expression, emotional facilitation of thinking, emotional understanding, and emotional regulation (Goldenberg, Matheson, & Mantler, 2006). Salovey and Mayer (1990) identify EI as a type of social intelligence that allows one to guide his or her thinking and actions by monitoring self and others' emotions and feelings. Emotionally intelligent principals are able to manage their own feelings well and read and deal effectively with other people's feelings (Goleman, 1998).

**Bandura's four sources to building self-efficacy.** Bandura (1993) contended that there are four sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and somatic and emotional states. Principals have the capacity to supply teachers with the experiences and beliefs needed to increase their self-efficacy. Principals can build upon teachers' setbacks and difficulties



with support and by providing a sense of confidence that the teacher will succeed if he or she remains resilient. The principal needs to reiterate that success requires effort and persistence through challenging situations. Principals can develop a teachers' strong sense of efficacy by helping them develop the skills to rebound from setback. Once teachers are able to do this, Bandura states they emerge stronger from adversity.

**Vicarious experiences.** Vicarious experiences refer to influences of modeling. Principals are often titled "instructional leaders" and can utilize this title to model the instructional or behavioral expectations the principal desires in his or her teachers. Bandura's (1993) comments on vicarious experience speaks directly to what principals can do:

People seek proficient models who possess the competencies to which they aspire. Through their behavior and expressed ways of thinking competent models transmit knowledge and teach observers effective skills and strategies for managing environmental demands. Acquisition of better means raises perceived self-efficacy. (p. 3)

**Social persuasion.** Principals' use of social persuasion can be exemplified by providing situations where teachers can be successful. Gradual increases in providing challenges will breed a better sense of self-efficacy than quick defeats. A key component of social persuasion is for the principal to measure success in terms of self-improvement rather than by accomplishments over peers. Social persuasion also includes verbal reinforcements of confidence in teacher actions.

**Somatic and emotional states.** The somatic and emotional states of teachers can be affected by classroom disruptions, tasks seen as burdensome and not tied to school

goals, or feelings of defeat. All three of these examples can be prevented by principals before they occur. If a principal can communicate to teachers that their feelings of exhaustion or fatigue are due to hard work that has or will pay off, there then becomes a perception or interpretation that these feelings can be a sense of self-success, that these feelings are an “energizing facilitator of performance” (Bandura, 1993, p. 3).

### **Principals’ instrumental support to build trust in parents and students.**

Regression analysis results for trust in parents and students found both emotional support and instrumental support were predictors; however, instrumental support had a higher significant link than emotional support. The role of parents to participate in a student’s education necessitates the need for teachers to trust parents (Goddard et al., 2001). One of the findings in Tschannen-Moran’s (2009) study pertaining to professionalism in schools was the notion that teacher trust in parents and students can create a greater sense of professionalism among colleagues. Not only is trust in parents significant to teachers, but also trust in students. Student-centered learning, collaborative groups, independent differentiated tasks, and choice require teachers to trust that students will engage in appropriate and meaningful ways. In addition, the reciprocal effect of trust can occur when students do not experience trust from their teachers, they will be less likely to engage in lessons (Ennis & McCauley, 2002).

Principals can provide resources through instrumental support that enable a stronger sense of trust in parents and students. Building relationships with parents requires time for teachers to make connections, communicate, and be open to the lines of communication from parents. Principals need to be cognizant of needed teacher time away from instruction to engage in duties required to build connections with parents.

Teachers often follow the examples that principals set for them. Principals who make time to meet and communicate with parents help establish the norms and structures that enable teachers to do the same.

Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) carried out a study to explore the effect that secondary schools' organizational context has on teachers' trust in students. One key finding included the importance of the level of trust students experience on behalf of their teachers. Van Maele and Van Houtte found that this level of trust influences students' engagement within the learning process. Principals and school leaders will need to develop ways to provide relationship building with teachers and students. Teachers appearing to want to build a relationship with a student will reap the benefits of students perceiving they can be trusted by their teachers. Another finding in the Van Maele and Van Houtte study that principals can have an impact on is teachers who perceive students as teachable are more likely to expose trust in students. They state that this is linked to the importance of teacher expectations for students being met or not. Principals can establish the expectations for rigor and student successes. If there is a culture of high expectations with abundant amounts of grading and assessment reporting, principals can ensure that teachers have the physical resources to assign such tasks and the appropriate amount of time to grade them.

**Principals' emotional support to build teachers' academic emphasis.** The third regression model demonstrated that emotional support predicts academic emphasis. Principals can set the tone of the school by setting standards for a learning environment that is orderly and serious. When a teacher handles discipline or student issues by herself, the principal needs to recognize her actions and support her discipline outcomes.

Emotional support can also be demonstrated by the principal when teachers adhere to high but achievable school academic goals and demonstrates a sense of trust in the teacher for what he or she is doing in the classroom. Principals who commend and reward teachers and students for outstanding academic performance underscore a school environment that respects academic achievement.

Academic emphasis is set when school leaders define and communicate shared goals that directly emphasize the academic success of students. Including teachers in the shared process elicits a sense of importance in teachers and contributes to promoting that climate of academic emphasis. It demonstrates to teachers that their contributions are important as well and make a difference. Teachers participating in the goal development process are also portraying academic emphasis at the individual level.

Goddard et al. (2000) propose that if academic emphasis improves school performance, then a reciprocal effect may be those improved school performances by strengthen the academic emphasis of the school. Principals can build upon this at the individual teacher level as well. Teachers experiencing success in a rigorous classroom and are supported by the principal may increase their academic emphasis to continue seeking positive achievement and principal confidence. Goddard et al. (2000) note that a teacher's sense of academic emphasis is associated with a collective sense of academic emphasis. This collective sense of academic emphasis is a valuable component of the school climate that reinforces academic affairs for individuals and in turn is itself reinforced (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 687).

**The power of teachers' academic optimism.** The urban high school data used in this study were determined to support academic optimism as a construct. Also, based

on the data from the final regression model, emotional support and instrumental support were seen as predictors of teacher academic optimism. Emotional support had a stronger link than instrumental support. In three of the four regression models, emotional support was a predictor of the dependent variable being tested. Academic optimism is a viable construct at the individual level (Beard et al., 2010; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

Academic optimism in teachers reflects a positive belief that he or she can make a difference in the academic performance of students by emphasizing academics and learning, by trusting parents and students to work together in the process, and resolving challenges by believing in his or her own capacity with strength and perseverance (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

Academic Optimism effects student achievement even after controlling for SES (Goddard et al., 2000). Based on this study, principals have the information they need to affect academic optimism in teachers which should influence student achievement. Emotional support is the key approach for principals to influence a teacher's academic optimism. Emotional support predicts teacher self-efficacy and academic emphasis of teachers, two of the three constructs of academic optimism.

Recall from the Principal Support Scale (DiPaola, 2012) those items that pertain to emotional support: “gives me a sense of importance—that I make a difference,” “supports my decisions,” “trusts my judgement in my classroom decisions,” and “shows confidence in my actions.” There are endless ways that a school leader can give a teacher a sense of importance, and based on this study, can go a long way for how a teacher performs in the classroom which in inevitably can reap benefits for student achievement.

**Implications for practice.** With high-stakes accountability from both the state and federal level using student achievement as their marker, urban schools and school districts need to search for those variables that principals can influence to reap positive results. This study found that certain factors of principal support can predict facets of teacher academic optimism and academic optimism itself in a sample of urban high schools. Principal preparation courses should investigate types of principal support, how they affect teachers, and how to actively and genuinely provide those supports. This study also strikes at the screening process for hiring principals. Interviewers of principals might need to review their interview questions to include content related to emotional, instrumental, and other types of social support. Perhaps an instrument to measure a principal's disposition to determine qualities such as empathy and altruism should be considered. In addition, Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) found that the more urban the school, the lower the academic optimism of the teachers. The teacher responses from this study were taken from high schools in an urban setting. Therefore, it is even more crucial for school leaders in urban settings to investigate appropriate principal support resources and the appropriate methods of exhibiting them. Challenges face classrooms across the country whether they are urban or not. The research from this study on the influences and connections between the constructs of academic optimism and academic optimism itself leads me to believe that these findings are likely to be applicable to all schools.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

This is one study from a sample of 11 urban high schools in the northeast United States. Therefore, the results may neither be generalized to all high schools in the northeast United States nor to high schools in the United States. This sample size is not

meant to be conclusive of the findings, yet provide results worthy of continuous investigation. Larger sample sizes may improve the generalizability of the results of this study.

This study provides a conceptual framework for exploring the effect of principal support on teacher academic optimism. This study suggests further research that includes student achievement as well as demographic information of participants. Additional studies could delve into the relationship between individual teacher academic optimism and student academic optimism.

## **Conclusion**

This research study revealed that there is a significant relationship between principal support and teacher's academic optimism. All of the variables in this study, including principal support and teacher academic optimism, were found to be positively correlated with one another. Emotional support was a strong predictor of academic emphasis of teachers, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher academic optimism. Instrumental support was a strong predictor of teacher trust in parents and students. Further research is needed to investigate these impacts on student achievement.

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## VITA

Todd Perelli was born in Glen Ellen, Illinois on October 10, 1972. After attending high school in Fairfax County, Virginia, he attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and graduated with a B.S. in Sociology in 1994. Todd received his Virginia teaching licensure and certification from Hollins College for middle grades 4-8 in 1995. He received his Master of Education degree in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership from the College of William and Mary in 2003. He plans to graduate from his doctoral coursework in the Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership Program at William and Mary in January of 2018.

Todd taught in grades 6-8 for five years in English, life science, physical science, and 6th and 7th grade social studies. After being Assistant Principal of a high and middle school for three years, he went on to the middle school principalship for 11 years. He is currently working as an Instructional Specialist and Project Director in the Central Office.